



It's true, school is almost out. You may have lots planned already or perhaps you haven't given it much thought yet. But it's coming. Your kids are excited. No more text books, teachers and homework, for a few months anyway. For parents however, summer may present mixed feelings. You might be excited for the change in routine too. But with the change in routine comes the question, "What do I do with the kids all summer"? Then there's the kids question that generally happens sometime during the first week of summer break, "I'm bored, what can I do?" Ah, the joy of summer!

As parents we want to consider summer activities that do more than simply fill time. We want to be intentional about the developmental opportunities that summer presents. Here are a few important suggestions for helping you and your kids make the most of the warm, wonderful days of summer.

Make an idea jar. With your kids, brainstorm ideas for things they can do at home this summer and write them down on strips of paper. Try to come up with as many as possible. When a slow afternoon hits, have them pull an idea out.

Balance unstructured time with planned activities and maintain routines. Avoid over-scheduling. It is important for children to decide how to use their time. Making choices helps kids develop self-esteem and critical life skills. Keep bedtimes, wake times and meal times within an hour of their school year schedule.



Assign household responsibilities and establish summer rules (i.e. electronics use, chores, playing in the neighborhood, safety, etc.) Having jobs in the house is important. All school age kids are capable of clearing the table, cleaning their rooms, making beds, sorting laundry, taking out the trash and helping with meal preparation.



Ensure they have plenty of fun things to read. Reading is so good for your kids! Studies show that kids who read and who are read to, do better in school than those who don't. Plan an outing to one of our excellent Carver County Libraries at least once a week. They have free and fun summer reading programs for school age kids. Have a designated reading time in your day. Read together and alone. Make sure your kids see you reading too!

Limit the use of all electronics to no more than 2 hours per day.

For optimal development kids need lots of physical activity and social interactions. Watching TV, playing electronic games and texting does not support their overall development. It is important to create alternatives to heavy media consumption.



Kids should spend most of their day

outside. Research shows that outdoor play is associated with positive childhood outcomes. Ensure that your children have plenty to do and let them use their imaginations (i.e. yard games, bubbles, sidewalk chalk, bikes, scooters, balls, bats, sand toys, hula hoops, Frisbees, inflatable pools, rocks, rope, old blankets and sheets, plastic measuring bowls, spoons, etc.) You can purchase inexpensive flashlights for night games.



Make a creativity box. Have a supply of pens, pencils, markers, paints, paper, glitter, glue, scissors, stickers, play dough and other craft supplies available at all times. Encourage them to write stories and make their own books. Use the school supplies that come home at the end of the year to get started. The benefits of music are well documented. Encourage your children to sing, dance, and make their own instruments from household items (cookware, spoons, empty toilet paper rolls, rice and tape). Take the creativity box outside for added fun.

Plan a variety of experiences. Summer is a great time to expand your child's world. If your child is really into sports, expose them to some artistic and cultural experiences. If your child is more sedentary, find some physical activity they might really enjoy trying. Find opportunities to expose your child to other cultures, perhaps a language camp. Find summer activities that provide opportunities to make new friends. Camps can foster many new experiences. Avoid sending them to the same camp program all summer long. Boredom can set in and the benefits plateau. All Minnesota kids should learn to swim!



Schedule at least one family fun night a week. Let the kids help plan it. Don't let summer go by without making important emotional connections with them. Children with secure, loving and supportive relationships are more resilient than those who don't and are better able to weather life's challenges. Have a cookout in the backyard or attend a free concert in the park. Take a bike ride on our amazing trail system. Go online (I like Google) to find great free deals for movies, bowling, museums, water parks and the zoo. Travel someplace new if finances permit.

I wish you a very healthy and happy summer with your children. See you in the fall! If you have any parenting questions or questions regarding your child's development, please free to contact me.

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